DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 954 PS 024 620

AUTHOR Araujo, Luisa
TITLE Pre-Service Teachers as Literacy Mediators during Children's Play.
PUB DATE Apr 96
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Association for Childhood Education International Conference (Minneapolis, MN, April 10-13, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Blacks; Cultural Influences; *Ethnic Stereotypes; Higher Education; Interpersonal Relationship; Kindergarten; *Literacy; Play; Preservice Teacher Education; Primary Education; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *African Americans; Cultural Deficit Theory; Cultural Sensitivity; *Preservice Teachers

ABSTRACT

This study investigated patterns of social interaction among four preservice teachers and kindergarten children in the context of literacy-enriched play centers. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions: Is there a relationship between preservice teachers' beliefs about children's literacy knowledge and the way in which they provide literacy information; and, to what degree do preservice teachers' interactions contribute to children's literacy learning? Over a period of 3 months, data were collected using ethnographic techniques of interviews, observations, field notes, and audio tapes. Patterns in the data indicated that preservice teachers and kindergarten children literacy conversations were predominantly adult-initiated and adult-controlled. Furthermore, interview data analysis suggested that preservice teachers' sociocultural beliefs influence their interactional style. Namely, those preservice teachers who believe that African-American children have deficient language skills seemed to adopt a cultural deficit model of teaching, while the preservice teachers who believed that the children were capable language users seemed to adopt a culturally responsive model of teaching. (Contains 16 references.)
(Author/WJC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Pre-Service Teachers as Literacy Mediators During Children's Play

Luisa Araujo

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 400 954

Abstract. This study investigates patterns of social interaction between four pre-service teachers and kindergarten children in the context of literacy-enriched play centers. Over a period of three months, data were collected using the ethnographic techniques of interviews, observations, field notes, and audio tapes. Patterns in the data indicate that pre-service teachers and kindergarten children literacy conversations were predominantly adult initiated and adult controlled. Furthermore, interview data analysis suggests that pre-service teachers' sociocultural beliefs influence their interactional style. Namely, those pre-service teachers who believe that African-American children have deficient language skills seemed to adopt a cultural deficit model of teaching. Whereas the pre-service teacher who believed that the children were capable language users seemed to adopt a cultural responsive model of teaching.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Luisa Araujo
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PS 024820

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Several studies of young children's literate behavior during play have suggested that dramatic play helps children develop verbal schemes associated with specific social roles (Snow, Shonkoff, Lee & Levin, 1985; Pellegrini, 1985). Other investigations in literacy-enriched play settings, suggest that children practice the conventions of print by engaging in purposeful reading and writing behaviors (Christie, 1991, Morrow & Rand, 1991a, Neuman & Roscos, 1992; Vukelich, 1990). Moreover, in literacy-rich play contexts children seem to further their understanding of the functions of print(Newman & Roskos, 1991; Schrader, 1991). Hence, when a house keeping corner changes to a restaurant with literacy props, children may "read" the menu to order food.

More recently, research suggests that adult intervention in literacy-enriched play settings may enhance minority children's understanding of print (Neuman & Roscos, 1993). In their study, Neuman and Roscos (1993) detailed how minority children may benefit from adult-initiated explicit teaching about print related information. These researchers point out that if we assume that all children have the same literacy understanding as middle-class children we may hinder their access to literacy. At present, emergent literacy literature recommends the implementation of literacy-enriched play centers at the kindergarten level (Morrow & Rand, 1991b; Rybczynski & Troy, 1995). However, little is known about how this might work with minority children. Similarly, there is a need to understand how prospective teachers view the task of

helping minority children develop literacy knowledge in such contexts.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to investigate how pre-service teachers interacted with minority children in literacy-enriched play settings. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions: 1) Is there a relationship between pre-service teachers' beliefs about children's literacy knowledge and the way in which they provide literacy information? and 2) To what degree do pre-service teachers' interactions contribute to children's literacy learning?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects were four pre-service teachers enrolled in an emergent literacy methods course at a large eastcoast university and forty four kindergartners divided between two classrooms. One teacher dyad was assigned to one classroom and the other dyad to the other classroom.

Setting

The pre-service teachers were placed in a kindergarten center which served, almost exclusively, African-American five-year-old

children, 90% receiving reduced lunch. The placement of the pre-service teachers at the center constituted the practicum component of the emergent literacy university course. Accordingly, they were required to implement their own literacy-enriched play centers for a period of four weeks and to interact with the children in the play areas every week for four hours every week. Play periods at the print-enriched centers were forty minutes long.

In one classroom a McDonald's restaurant was set up with a large menu board, a cash register, and job application forms. In the other classroom a grocery store was in place and included a cash register, coupons, printed signs for discount items and for shelf organization purposes, magazines for sale, and personal checks. Previous research (Morrow & Rand, 1991a) had indicated that children like to manipulate print and that a variety of print materials should be available to maximize children's engagement in literacy-enriched play.

Procedures

A qualitative research approach was followed for this study which took approximately four months to complete. In the first phase of research structured interviews were conducted with the pre-service teachers. These focused on what these pre-service teachers believed was the best way to teach literacy in general and in literacy-rich play settings in particular. In the second phase of the research the pre-service teachers implemented their own

literacy-enriched play centers. During this time I took field notes and tape recorded the pre-service teachers' interactions with children at the play centers. Total observation time comprised 4 hours and 40 minutes and interactions captured on audio tape reflected 80 minutes of play conversations. In the final phase of this research the cyclic process of data analysis continued and emergent hypothesis concerning different interactional styles were checked by once again interviewing informants.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by means of searching for patterns across interviews, tape-recorded speech and field notes. Interconnections between pre-service teachers' beliefs and in locus interactional style were examined. Transcribed speech pertinent to pre-service teachers' interactions with children in the play centers were checked by the informants and their own explanations about their interactional style were noted. A sociolinguistic paradigm was constructed according to the marked differences between pre-service teachers' interactional style.

Results

Sociolinguistic Assumptions

"You ain't allowed in here, only two people!" exclaimed George, a customer at the *Superprice* grocery store. George was an active customer who scribbled several checks to pay for his groceries at

the same time that he tried to regulate other children's behavior.

Mary and Rosa, the two pre-service teachers in this play area, thought George was making good use of the literacy props available but that he was far too rude and even aggressive in the way he tried to regulate everyone else's behavior. Moreover, they noted, he and the other children in the class did not use standard grammar. They often heard them say *ain't* and, as Mary observed, children often put the verb before the subject and dropped the auxiliary in sentences like *She going to the store*. Also, Rosa noted that sometimes *ed* for past tense was not used.

In addition, the pre-service teachers noticed that another language characteristic differentiated these African-American children from white Americans; their lack of descriptive vocabulary. As Emma expressed: "… they [children] won't say 'let me tell about the time I was playing with my brother, like they won't describe their experiences." Moreover, at times, they didn't seem to understand what teachers said. For example, Mary explains, "I have to be very careful with what I say at the center because they [children] will be like 'What does that mean?'"

However, Diane the other pre-service teacher interviewed, emphasized that she understood children just fine despite their use of Black English syntax and different vocabulary. She stated, "I personally don't speak that way but I understand what they mean, you know, by the context of their sentences." Furthermore, her own orientation was that "Black English has its own grammatical rules,

it's not inferior." Thus, her position stands in sharp contrast with the beliefs expressed by the other pre-service teachers. Specifically, Diane does not believe these children have language deficient skills as the other pre-service teachers seem to think.

As Flores, Tefft, and Diaz (1991) posit in their analysis of deficit myths, a language deficiency perspective persists in society at large and in schools. A common belief is that minority children come to school language handicapped and with lack of experiences. Furthermore, many educators believe it is their duty to cure these handicaps. Namely, by having minority students go through a process of acculturation into the "right" linguistic code and have them forget about heir own culturally-specific linguistic code which, of course, is considered inferior (Flores, Tefft, & Diaz, 1991).

Mary, Rosa, and Emma seem to endorse this language deficiency view and as opposed to Diane, did not express sensitivity to cultural differences. Diane's cultural sensitivity is best expressed by her in the following statement: "As a teacher I'm a window to the world and I want to teach children that we're all people and we have differences but that's what makes the world exciting. There is nothing wrong in being different."

The way pre-service teachers pointed out the world of literacy to children during play was ultimately a reflection of how they saw themselves as "windows to the world". All pre-service teachers were observed to turn their interactions with children into

teachable moments. However, Diane stands out as a facilitator in play interactions while the other pre-service teachers stand out as controllers of play events.

Ways of Pointing out the World

As a classroom teacher, Diane wants to encourage children to figure out things on their own with the teacher serving as a facilitator in this process. The following statements illustrate this idea: "I would say to a kid who asked me how to spell Jason 'I've noticed that you're wearing your name tags today', they have their pictures and names so they can see and figure it out on their own." And, "if the teacher is there [play center] they want the teacher to tell them everything but if the teacher is not there they try to figure it out by themselves." This is consistent with Diane's stance at the McDonalds center where she was observed to step back from time to time and to tell children "I'm not playing now, I'm here watching these guys play, now."

Diane also likes the idea of modeling (playing out a role) to point out ways of talking and acting in literacy-enriched play centers. She said she would enter the ongoing play and adopt a role in much the same way the other pre-service teachers said they would do. For example, Rosa adopted the following role at the grocery store:

Child: "Fifty seven dollars".

Rosa: "Fifty seven dollars?" O.K. thank you. This is a check, some people write out checks when they don't have money they write checks. I'll write the date up here; today is May 1st, pay to *Superprice grocery*. I have to put the money down. I have to put how much I owe."

Child: "Fifty seven."

Rosa: "Fifty seven, O.K. and the numbers in here and I write my name in here. My first name is Emma and what's my second name?

Child: "Zegler."

Rosa: " Thank you and here is my check."

Although all pre-service teachers seemed to agree on ways to point out the world to children, children initiated conversations with Diane more often than they did with the other pre-service teachers. When a child asked, "What does this say?" Diane answered "This says customer. The customer is the person who orders food". In contrast, Mary, Rosa, and Emma were found to initiate and direct children behavior more often. For example, they would ask, "Who wants to be the customer?" and "What does it say on your hat?" This is consistent with Wells'(1986) findings that, at school, "children are reduced for a much greater part of the time to the more passive role of respondent, trying to answer the teacher's many questions and carrying out his or her requests (Wells, 1986, p.87)."

Also, in situations where the teacher is the main initiator of talk, children's ability to solve problems and learn from each other may be hindered. Diane was not the main initiator of talk in the McDonalds play area. Consequently, a few instances where children coached each other in solving problems were observed. In the following episode John and Mahagony were filling out a job application to work at MacDonalds.

Mahogany: "What do you do here [points to *name*]."

John: "You have to write your name to work here."

(Mahogany writes her name and John writes his name on his form, then John asks Mahogany how to write the teacher's name to fill in the next slot of information)

Mahogany: "C-M-J-R."

(John writes M-C-R).

The two children helped each other with the spelling and in this process figure out what to do with the job application form. Newman and Roscos (1991) also found that children often served as literacy informants for each other in both writing and reading processes during play. However, when teachers dominate the play the results can be quite different. For example, a similar situation handled by Emma, the other pre-service teacher at the McDonalds play area, did not allow for peer assistance.

Setsha: How do you spell your name?

Alisha: "A-L."

Setsha: (writes looking at Alisha for next letter)

Emma: "What are you doing?"

Emma interrupts Alisha to ask what they are doing, Setsha stops and upon telling Rosa that she wants to write Alisha, Rosa provides the spelling for her. In addition to hampering children's development as problem solvers and to making a higher proportion of requests, the three pre-service teachers who believe in the deficit myth were also observed to use specific types of questions to guide children's behavior.

Sociolinguistic Analysis

A detailed sociolinguistic analysis of the tape recorded speech indicates that the cultural deficit believers have a particular questioning style different from that of the cultural sensitive pre-service teacher. For example, they often used question-directives that were to be understood by children as commands for action as well as tag-questions.

Table 1 presents the contrasting ways in which the pre-service teachers interacted with children.

Table 1

Sociolinguistic Paradigm	Question-Directives	Tag-Questions	If-Then Questions	Logical-Reasoning Questions
Cultural-Sensitive Pre-service teacher	(1)Directive requiring physical performance	No instances	No instances	Logical Reasoning question requiring physical and verbal performance
Cultural-Deficit Pre-service teachers	(2)Directive requiring physical and verbal performance	Tag-Question requiring physical and verbal performance	If-Then Question requiring physical and verbal performance	No instances
Examples	(1)"Are you in line to get food?" (2)"Did you ring her up and tell her how much she owed you?"	"We have three clients, we should make a line, shouldn't we?"	"She is staying here, what do you have to give her?"	"Can I have some money so I can buy some food?"

Diane uses logical reasoning questions to probe children's behavior. She does this by using *so* as a way of explaining the *why* of doing something. For example, she says, "Can I have some money so I can buy some food?". The cultural deficit believers use instead *If-then* questions that ask for deductive reasoning on the part of the children. For example, "She's staying here, what do you have to give her?" and, "You're a customer, should you be cleaning up?" In the first example, the pre-service teacher was probing the child to tell her that she needed a tray to eat at

McDonalds. However, the child does not provide an answer and the pre-service teacher then adds, "Give her a tray first, she's staying here"; a statement that lacks an explicit explanation of why people who stay at McDonalds need a tray.

Similarly, when children were asked question-directives that required both physical and verbal performance they did not respond appropriately. As it is illustrated in table 1, when a child playing cashier at McDonalds is asked if she has told another child how much to pay for the meal, she simply replied "No!" It is clear that the child does not understand what she has been asked to do and the pre-service teacher then proceeds to guide her in the process of "ringing up" children at the cash register without explaining the procedure.

As Cazden (1988) notes question-directives reflect a command to act and are not to be understood as yes/no questions which syntactically they are. The children, however, are interpreting question-directives as yes-no questions perhaps because they are unfamiliar with this "…interactional function, and the expression of social meaning…" (Cazden, 1988, p.43).

Another dimension of contrast between the pre-service teachers is the use of tag questions by the cultural deficit believers, but not by the cultural sensitive one. Again, as it is the case with question-directives, these questions ask for particular types of responses. Nonetheless, the children were not observed to grasp this idea because they did not perform the actions requested. For

example, the child who was asked, "We have three clients, we should make a line, shouldn't we?" did not tell the clients to make a line. This stands in contrast with Cook-Gumperz and Corsaro's findings (1977) in preschool classrooms. Their observations indicated that tag-questions did influence the course of activities in ways the teachers expected (Cook-Gumperz & Corsaro, 1977).

However, these researchers were not observing African-American children who may not have been socialized into this way of speaking and are therefore at a disadvantage to understand this type of discourse. Interestingly, the use of tag-questions has been identified by Heath (1983) as a characteristic of the type of adult speech middle-class parents direct to their children (Heath, 1983), but not as a characteristic of the ways in which the black community she studied interacted with youngsters. This further suggests that Black children may not be familiar with this speech form.

Discussion

All four pre-service teachers can be described as middle-class Americans with the same type of school experiences. They have all been through public school and have taken the same kind of multicultural education requirements. They all seemed to believe that children needed guidance in the process of learning the rules of the literacy-enriched play and in familiarizing themselves with the play contexts.

Nonetheless, this study suggest that their assumptions about these minority children's linguistic and social knowledge influence their educational practice. The cultural deficit believers adopted a cultural deficit model of teaching, whereas the cultural sensitive teacher adopted a cultural responsive model of teaching. The latter gave children more opportunities to solve problems on their own and to initiate interactions. Moreover, when both responding to children questions and when asking questions herself, she tried to provide children with the conceptual understanding necessary for the children to understand what the situation called for.

Clearly, the pre-service teachers who was more cultural sensitive and did not believe in the language deficit myth responded to children in a way they could understand. In contrast, the other pre-service teachers responded to literacy play in a way that was not the most beneficial for children.

Implications

This study indicates that different pedagogical stances result according to different belief systems. This deserves further attention because if we want prospective teachers to facilitate learning among all students we may have to teach them to examine their belief systems and to teach them how minority children can be socialized in different patterns of talk.

Literacy play interventions may constitute ideal contexts for

children to further their understandings about language, print, and print related situations. However, adult guidance during literacy play should not control children' play and should take into account how ethnically and socially diverse children may be socialized into different patterns of talk. A few suggestions for how to interact with children in play centers come to mind: 1) Let children initiate talk, 2) Engage in explicit teaching in context (e.g. the customer is the person who buys food), and 3) Do not assume that children are familiar with your interactional style; interact in a way children can understand.

References

Cazden, C. B.(1988). Classroom discourse. Portmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Christie, J. (1991). Psychological research on play: Connections with early literacy development. In J. Christie (Ed.), Play and Early Literacy. NY: Sunny.

Cook-Gumperz, J. & Corsaro, W. A. (1977). Social-ecological constraints on children's communicative strategies. Sociology, 11, 411-434.

Flores, B., Cousin, P., Diaz, E. (1991). Transforming deficit myths about learning, language, and culture. Language Arts, 68, (5), 369-379.

Heath, S. B. (1983). Ways with Words. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Morrow, L. M., & Rand, M. (1991a). Preparing the classroom environment to promote literacy during play. In J. Christie (Ed.), Play and Early Literacy. NY: Sunny.

Morrow, L. M., & Rand, M. (1991b). Promoting literacy during play by designing early childhood classroom environments. The Reading Teacher, 44, (6), 396-402.

Neuman, S., & Roskos, K. (1991). The influence of literacy-enriched play centers on preschoolers conceptions of the functions of print. In J. Christie (Ed.), Play and Early Literacy. NY: Sunny.

Neuman, S., & Roskos, K. (1992). Literacy Objects as cultural

tools: Effects on children's literacy behaviors in play. Reading Research Quarterly, 27, (3) 203-225.

Neuman, S., & Roskos, K. (1993). Access to print for children of poverty: Differential effects of adult mediation and literacy-enriched play settings on environmental and functional print tasks. American Educational Research Journal, 30, (1) 95-122.

Pellegrini, A. (1985). The relations between symbolic play and literate behavior: A review and critique of the empirical literature. Review of Educational Research, 55, (1), 107-121.

Rybczynski, M. & Troy, A. (1995). Literacy-enriched play centers: Trying them out in "the real world". Childhood Education, 72, 7-12.

Schrader, C. T. (1991). Symbolic play: A source of meaningful engagements with writing and reading. In J. Christie (Ed.), Play and Early Literacy. NY: Sunny.

Snow, C., Shonkoff, F., Lee, K., & Levin, H. (1986). Learning to play doctor: Effects of sex, age, and experience in hospital. Discourse Processes, 9, 461-473.

Vukelich, C. (1990). Where's the paper? Literacy during play. Childhood Education, 66, 205-209.

Wells, G.(1986). The meaning makers. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.